



Vet Voice Foundation

CONSERVATION POLICY GUIDE





Our Mission

Despite popular media depictions, veterans do not exist in a "bubble." From rural communities and cities, from enlisted to officers, veterans have become part of the fabric of daily American life. For that reason, Vet Voice Foundation ensures that veterans' voices have no boundaries either.

Founded in 2009, the mission of Vet Voice Foundation is to mobilize veterans to become leaders in our nation's democracy through participation in the civic and democratic process. VVF seeks to harness the energy and drive of the dedicated men and women who have fought for their country, and put it to work at home and in their communities on the important issues they face, such as the environment, renewable energy development, jobs, health care, and housing.

Throughout the country, veterans share a strong connection with the outdoors and believe that protecting our national public lands is a patriotic duty. Our national parks, forests, battlefields, monuments, wildlife areas, and other national public lands are part of our country's outdoor heritage.

The Vet Voice Foundation Conservation Policy Guide examines VVF's mission and provides an overview of public lands issues.



Goals



Introduce Vet Voice Foundation's mission to new members of Congress



Foster understanding about veterans and their connection to public lands



Establish veterans as a trusted voice on public land issues throughout the country



Inspire decision makers when considering public land legislation



Did you know?

As of 2016, veterans made up 17% of the workforce at Department of Interior. That's over 12,000 veteran employees. One in five Bureau of Land Management employees is a veteran.



Veterans & Active Duty Military

Our country's veterans and active duty military live throughout communities across America. They rely on public lands to train and to reintegrate back into society. It's imperative that we continue to invest in our public lands, infrastructure, and recreational opportunities. Here are the numbers.

The U.S. has nearly 22 million veterans according to the Census Bureau.

According to the Defense Department, there were a total of 1.3 million active duty military and more than 800,000 reserve forces as of September 2017.

Total active duty per branch:

U.S Army: 472,000

U.S. Navy: 319,000

U.S. Air Force: 319,000

U.S. Marine Corps: 184,000

U.S. Coast Guard: 41,000

As of September 2017, the states with the most total active duty and reserve members of the military were:

California: 184,540

Texas: 164,234

Virginia: 115,280

North Carolina: 112,951

Florida: 92,249

Georgia: 88,089

Washington: 64,066

South Carolina: 55,369

New York: 48,974

Colorado: 47,636

As of September 2017, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the states with the most total veterans were:

California: 1,851,470

Texas: 1,680,418

Florida: 1,583,697

Pennsylvania: 939,069

New York: 892,221

Ohio: 866,481

Virginia: 781,388

North Carolina: 775,020

Georgia: 752,882

Illinois: 721,575



"For me, hunting is a way to reconnect to the roots of where I grew up and folks I knew...having lost contact with the sport and the people because of two decades of service. It's also a great way to spend time with Marine buddies other than slinging drinks in a bar."

- Rob Bracknell, U.S. Marine Corps



Veterans & Public Lands

Veterans believe that public lands deserve to be treated with respect in order to honor these special places and preserve the lands for future generations.

Many veterans feel a sense of pride about the special beauty of America's natural places as well as an appreciation of the historical significance of these lands for our country.

Continuing family traditions (annual vacations to national parks; camping, hiking, and hunting together) lend personal gravity to the idea of protecting public lands.

The notion of reducing access or making public lands access more difficult (for hiking, sightseeing, hunting, and fishing) is anathema, especially if it is being done for the benefit of private, for-profit developers and/or out-of-state moneyed interests.

Preserving public lands for future generations is a major priority for veterans, who want their children and grandchildren to be able to see and experience natural wonders of our public lands.



"Walking Off The War"

Public lands play a pivotal role in the emotional and spiritual recovery for some veterans.

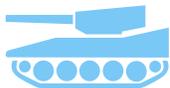
The ability to access public lands has made it easier to transition back to civilian life--whether it's reconnecting with family and friends, hunting, fishing, hiking, or finding peace and solitude, our public lands provide our veterans with these needed opportunities. Vet Voice Foundation refers to this as, "walking off the war."



Protecting Our Military Bases

Across the country, the military is a part of life. For example, California is home to five military installations that each span more than 300,000 acres, including Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base (U.S. Marine Corps), Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake (U.S. Navy), Fort Irwin National Training Center (U.S. Army), Edwards Air Force Base, and Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range (used by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps). The areas surrounding these five military bases are also defined by our public lands. The lands provide a natural barrier to encroachment threats and allow military readiness in the California Desert to prevail.

In June 2017, the Sonoran Institute, with input from the Vet Voice Foundation, released a report titled, "Evaluating Encroachment Pressures on the Military Mission in the California Desert Region." This report revealed that the five military CA desert bases face development that is incompatible with military activities, wind and solar projects that create new obstructions in military airspace, recreational activities that stray into military training areas, and overuse of water resources that are necessary for military operations. To ensure military readiness and protection of wildlife habitats, the Sonoran Institute recommends the following:



A coordinated and collaborative approach for the management of natural resources in the region is required in order to sustain the viability of military missions in region.

Joint Land Use Studies (JLUS) need to be developed and kept up-to-date with surrounding communities in order to encourage compatible land uses and address water resource challenges. In addition, some installations are focusing on implementation strategies from their planning documents, which will provide better long-term outcomes.

Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs) need to be constantly updated in response to changing management requirements, natural resource conditions, and policy.

Military advocacy groups should be empowered to engage with stakeholders in pursuit of solutions that could include new conservation designations and/ or federal or state policy that proactively addresses encroachment challenges.

For more information visit: www.sonoraninstitute.org



Recreation & Tourism

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, the United States outdoor recreation economy generates:

\$887 billion in consumer spending

7.6 million jobs

\$65.3 billion in federal tax revenue

\$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue



A Look Across the Country

Northeast: \$141.3 billion in spending and nearly 1.2 million jobs

South: \$320.7 billion in spending and nearly 2.8 million jobs

Midwest: \$170.7 billion in spending and nearly 1.5 million jobs

West: \$254.1 billion in spending and nearly 2.2 million jobs



The Issues

Land & Water Conservation Fund

Vet Voice Foundation supports policies that protect current public lands and conserve new ones through programs such as the **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**, which protects national parks and forests and provides grant funding for local community projects.

LWCF is an important tool for:

- ▶ Upholding family outdoor traditions
- ▶ Improving access to public land
- ▶ Protecting historic battlefields and America's heritage
- ▶ Fostering recreation and recovery in the outdoors
- ▶ Creating places for kids to be more active

Vet Voice Foundation calls on members of Congress to permanently reauthorize and fully fund LWCF.



Did you know?

Flight 93 National Memorial

On September 11, 2001, after attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the passengers of United Flight 93 made the heroic decision to fight back against the terrorists that had taken over their plane. They fought for control of the plane, which crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. LWCF contributed \$10 million to protect the "Field of Honor" and the Flight 93 National Memorial to honor the brave heroes of Flight 93.

LWCF grants have been used to support projects that honor veterans in states across the country, including:

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park (Buffalo, NY)
Worland Veterans Park (Washakie, WY)
Veterans Memorial (Seminole, FL)
War Memorial Park (Bristol, VA)
Veterans' Park (Denver, CO)
Aberdeen Veterans/Holgate Parks (Brown, SD)
Veteran's Park (San Juan, NM)
Veterans Memorial State Forest (Benzie, MI)
Veterans Memorial Park (La Crosse, WI)



The Issues

The Antiquities Act

Vet Voice Foundation supports upholding the **Antiquities Act** which allows the president to protect America's natural areas and historical sites as national monuments. Sixteen presidents – eight from each party – have used the Act to protect or expand national monuments, including the Mojave Trails National Monument, home to a desert camp used by General George S. Patton to train his troops in WWII for combat on the sands of North Africa, and the Fort Ord National Monument, which served as a training site for soldiers from World War I through the Vietnam War. Since taking office, President Donald Trump has ordered the Interior Department to review our country's national monuments that are larger than 100,000 acres. Below are the 27 National Monuments that have been or are currently under review:

President Donald Trump issued proclamations attempting to decimate the following monuments:

Bears Ears, Utah
Grand Staircase-Escalante, Utah

The Department of the Interior completed reviews of the following six national monuments and recommended no changes:

Canyons of the Ancients, Colorado
Craters of the Moon, Idaho
Grand Canyon-Parashant, Arizona
Hanford Reach, Washington
Sand to Snow, California
Upper Missouri River Breaks, Montana

The following 19 national monuments were under review, and their status is unclear:

Basin and Range, Nevada
Berryessa Snow Mountain, California
Carrizo Plain, California
Cascade Siskiyou, Oregon
Giant Sequoia, California
Gold Butte, Nevada
Ironwood Forest, Arizona
Katahdin Woods and Waters, Maine
Marianas Trench, Northern Mariana Islands/Pacific Ocean
Mojave Trails, California
Northeast Canyons and Seamounts, Atlantic Ocean
Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, New Mexico
Pacific Remote Islands, Pacific Ocean
Papahānaumokuākea, Hawaii/Pacific Ocean
Rio Grande del Norte, New Mexico
Rose Atoll, American Samoa/Pacific Ocean
San Gabriel Mountains, California
Sonoran Desert, Arizona
Vermilion Cliffs, Arizona



The Issues

Renewable Energy Production

Vet Voice Foundation supports policies that ramp up **renewable energy** production on our public lands to increase our homeland security as well as the safety of our troops abroad. Investing in clean, renewable energy sources decreases our country's dependence on fossil fuels.

VVF has been working to ensure oil and gas companies capture methane gas at drill sites instead of leak it or flare it. When companies lease public lands to drill they are extracting valuable resources that are publicly owned. While our military is engaged in the defense of fossil fuel extraction and transportation around the globe, VVF believes that we shouldn't be wasting energy resources at home that increase climate change hazards and harm our public health.

As we move forward, it is critical to use a smart approach to developing renewable energy sources that will protect the other valuable resources that public lands offer, including recreation and wildlife habitat. A 2013 Vet Voice Foundation poll found that two-thirds of veterans in Western states want a balanced approach to energy development that also protects recreation and wildlife habitat.

National Defense Authorization Act

Vet Voice Foundation supports and defends the sanctity of the **National Defense Authorization Act** (NDAA). The NDAA specifies the annual budget and expenditures of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). Throughout the years, many attempt to include unrelated riders into this must pass bill.

The NDAA is the legislation used to get our troops the training and equipment needed to successfully complete their service at home and abroad. It also funds veteran benefit programs that are due to the men and women who have sacrificed and worn the uniform for the United States. VVF believes this legislation should not be used to degrade wildlife protections, decrease our clean air, or pollute our clean water.



The Issues

Vet Voice Foundation urges support for wildlife and public lands protections.

Wildlife Protection: The world is currently facing a devastating sixth mass extinction. Recent scientific studies show that one in six species could face extinction by the end of the century, and mammal species are going extinct at such a rate that—if current conservation efforts are not improved—nature will need 3-5 million years to recover to current biodiversity levels. At the same time, our nation’s most effective law for protecting wildlife in danger of extinction—the Endangered Species Act—is itself facing an unprecedented threat in Congress and the Administration.

Legislative: In the 115th Congress, there were more than 100 separate bills and amendments to weaken the Endangered Species Act—our most effective law for protecting wildlife in danger of extinction. These proposals include riders and standalone legislation to remove or preclude protections for imperiled species—decisions that are supposed to be made by scientists at the federal wildlife agencies; exempt entire agencies or industries from complying with the law; or weaken the Endangered Species Act itself, by undermining the role of science, limiting citizens’ ability to enforce the law, and making it harder to protect imperiled wildlife in the first place. We are hopeful that wildlife champions in Congress will hold the administration accountable and conduct oversight of the Department of Interior’s attempts to weaken the law via regulations. Further, appropriators should fully fund the Endangered Species Act, so that it can continue protecting our wildlife heritage for future generations.

Administrative: In July 2018, the Trump administration proposed a set of dangerous regulations that would weaken the Endangered Species Act. These regulations would make it harder to protect threatened species under the law, delaying lifesaving action that could make it impossible to save them. The regulations would also make it harder to protect polar bears and other species at risk from climate change, and give the drilling, mining, and logging industries more leeway to destroy fragile wildlife habitats, which could drive our most imperiled species to extinction. Finally—and most concerning of all—the Trump administration is seeking to inject economic considerations into decisions about whether a species deserves protection—decisions meant to be made on the best available science.



The Issues

Legislation

Around the country there is bipartisan support for public lands that are proposed wilderness or recreation areas. Vet Voice Foundation supports the following **legislation** that protects these public lands.

VVF supports protections of **Camp Hale** and the **Continental Divide Wilderness**. Protections for these regions would support wildlife connectivity and also preserve the historic home of the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division in Colorado. A piece of American military history that contributed to the success in WWII and helped spur the ski industry around the nation.

Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests

Act. Congressman Jared Huffman (D-CA) introduced this legislation in an effort to restore national forest land and fish habitat, stimulate local economies through forest stewardship programs, enhance recreational opportunities including through trails and visitor centers, and reduce fire danger.

California Desert Protection and Recreation Act of 2017. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) (co-sponsored by Senator Kamala Harris, D-CA) introduced this bill to improve protections for 300,000 acres of California desert lands. The bill also designates off-highway vehicle recreation areas, protects 10,000 acres of sacred land to the Quechan Tribe, and protects sensitive areas from future development.

California Off-Road Recreation and Conservation Act. Congressman Paul Cook (R-CA) introduced this bill to establish or expand six Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Areas in the California desert. This bill also ensures that OHV activity is conducted in appropriate locations, protecting other parts of the desert.



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Flatside Wilderness Act (AR): Congressman French Hill (R-AR) introduced a bill to add approximately 640 acres from the Ouachita National Forest as wilderness. This bill has already been marked up in the House and section of the bill passed the Senate as part of the Interior Appropriations bill.

Cerros Del Norte (NM): Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM), co-sponsored by Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), introduced legislation to designate two new wilderness areas - Ute Mountain (Cerro del Yuta) and San Antonio Mountain (Rio San Antonio) - within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument established in 2013. The two proposed wilderness areas will comprise 21,420 acres of the 242,500-acre national monument northwest of Taos, New Mexico. It will also be a good example of protecting wilderness after National Monument designation. This bill is now attached to the Energy Bill.

Organ Mountain Desert Peaks (NM): Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) introduced legislation to designate eight new wilderness areas within the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument established in 2014. The proposed wilderness areas will comprise 241,786 acres of the 496,330 acre national monument northeast of, Las Cruces New Mexico. The bill is co-sponsored by Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM), a wilderness champion. It will be another good example of protecting wilderness after National Monument designation. This bill has been marked up in the Senate.

Pershing County (NV): Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) and Congressman Mark Amodei (R-NV) have introduced a bill to designate over 136,000 acres of wilderness in Pershing County. This bill is well supported in the County by mining and ranching interests, landowners, local elected officials, and conservationists, and would consolidate checkerboard lands and address some mining issues in the region.



The Issues

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Oregon Wildlands (OR): Senators Wyden (D-OR) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) have introduced legislation to protect over 100,000 acres of wilderness for the Wild Rogue and Devil's Staircase areas, designate 252 miles of wild and scenic rivers, and preserve 119,120 acres of the Rogue Canyon and Molalla rivers as national recreation areas. People visit lands in the proposal to hike, fish, whitewater raft, kayak, and camp. Congressmen Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Curt Shriver (D-OR) has introduced protections for the lands and waters in their districts that are within the landscapes of the Senate bill. The proposal would protect key drinking water sources and critical salmon habitat while at the same time promoting a sustainable economic base for these rural communities. The bill has moved through the Senate committee. Rep. Bishop has yet to allow the House versions similar hearings or markups.

Tennessee Wilderness (TN): Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Bob Corker (R-TN) along with Congressman Phil Roe (R-TN) have introduced legislation, in both the House and Senate, to designate nearly 20,000 acres of wilderness in the Cherokee National Forest by expanding existing wilderness units and creating a new 9,000-acre Upper Bald River Wilderness Area. The measure would preserve important watersheds and habitat for native brook trout, black bear, bobcat, grey fox, and white-tailed deer, and would protect popular migratory, breeding, and wintering habitat for numerous bird species. This proposal has strong local support and strong support from a Republican Senator. Rep Roe's (R-TN) wilderness legislation in the House supports the protections of the Senate bill that are in his district. The Senate version has passed the Senate as part of the Farm bill and is also currently incorporated in the Senate version of the Energy Bill. Though it has yet to have a hearing on the House side, Roe has supported the measure's inclusion in the Farm Bill via a letter of support to conferees.

The Emery County Public Land Management Act (UT): Sponsored by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Congressman John Curtis (R-UT), the act will preserve nearly 540,000 acres of the San Rafael Swell in Emery County as wilderness. The bill would also designate 63 miles of the Green River as Wild and Scenic and establish a more than 341,000-acre National Recreation Area in the San Rafael Swell, protecting the area from new mining and road construction. It would also establish a new Jurassic National Monument on a site that boasts one of the greatest concentrations of Jurassic-era dinosaur bones in the world. Because of the bill's Senate's champion, this bill will be a critical part of any lands package and could even move alone via a tax extenders or omnibus bill.



The Issues

Inclusivity & Diversity

Vet Voice Foundation supports public lands policies that reflect the U.S. military's on-going **commitment to inclusivity and respect for diversity**. The U.S. military has been a leader in driving progress on social issues for years, including President Truman's Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces; the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell; and the opening of all combat specialties to women in 2016. VVF supports policies that ensure the stories and heritage of all Americans are reflected in our system of parks and public lands.

VVF supports the **Outdoors for All Act**. Senator Kamala Harris introduced this bill to help states and local governments build or improve close-to-home public parks and green spaces in underserved and economically disadvantaged urban communities.



"We love to get outdoors - it's good for the soul to get outside and explore. Growing up in Santa Cruz, California, I had the beautiful Pacific Ocean and epic waves to ride at Steamer's Lane, and we hiked and camped in the Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. My wife and I love to bring our kids to visit these places, and after serving overseas in the military, I gained a special appreciation for not only our freedoms, but our priorities as a country.

I treasure the fact that we protect our National Parks and resources so that I can share the experience with my kids and they can do the same.

- CHARLIE EADIE, U.S. ARMY VETERAN



How You Can Help

Work to ensure public lands stay in public hands

Advocate for decisions that are good for our communities and environment

Make sure that public lands can be passed down unimpaired to our children and our grandchildren

Support projects that honor veterans and protect military history (battlefields)
Be a trusted voice on veteran and public land issues

Contact

Please contact Vet Voice Foundation for additional information, areas of public lands concern for you and your constituents, and ways to collaborate.

Major General (Ret.) Paul Eaton, Managing Director: peaton@vetvoicefoundation.org

Will Fischer, DC Government Relations: will@vetvoicefoundation.org

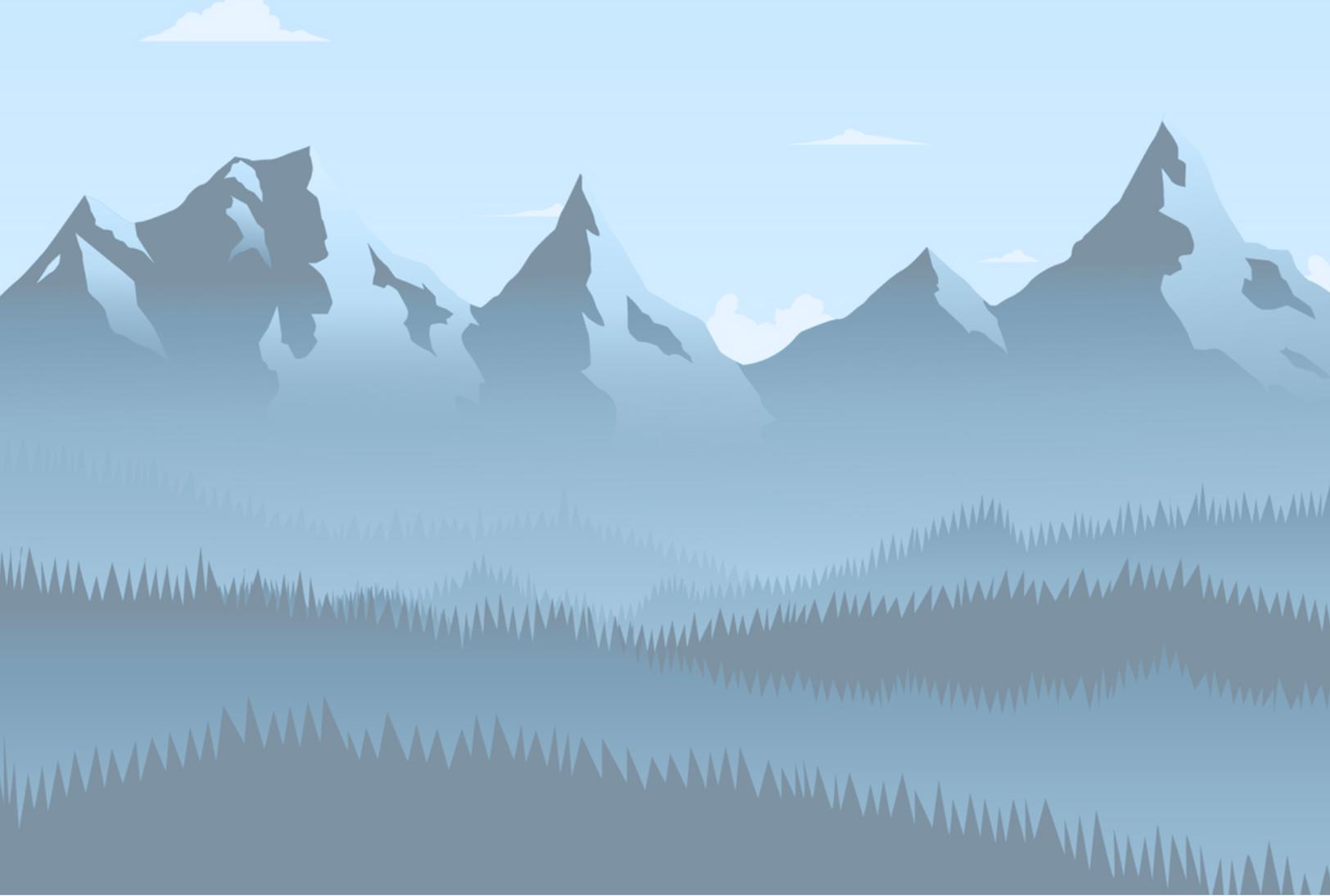
Garett Reppenhagen, VVF Rocky Mountain Director: repp@vetvoicefoundation.org

Kate Hoit, VVF California Director: kate@vetvoicefoundation.org

Rick Hegdahl, Program Director: rick@vetvoicefoundation.org



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Vet Voice Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, organized under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, for charitable and educational purposes.

VVF has more than 600,000 veterans, military family members, and supporters as members.

